



Above and opposite page: Competitors look down at their holsters during the critical gun change. This is a no-no.

Things Are Looking Up

by Kenda Lenseigne, CMSA World and National Champion

The clock begins to roll as your horse thunders across the starting line. With each stride you gain momentum, yet your first five targets come to you in slow motion, with perfect cadence; it's one of those runs you are sure to reminisce about later around the campsite. The fifth target bursts and - just like a scene in a movie, we hit pause and narrate what is about to happen. The remaining part of our perfectly executed stage is at a pivotal moment, caused by something as seemingly insignificant as a drop of the head, a change in body position and a shift in balance. We have just looked down for our gun change. By the time we look up, our horse is off course, slowed down, late on our next target or we have just hit a barrel. The explanation of why we would do such a thing can have only one cause: we weren't looking where we were going.

Looking down for your gun change is a dirty little habit formed early on. It's human nature to find reassurance in knowing where your holster is by looking for it and simply becomes one of the to-do things on our mental checklist when we first get started. If you haven't entered the sport with a trainer or

instructor harping to not to do this, it sets in as a habit. As time goes on and we become more seasoned competitors, we grow in gun handling, horsemanship and progress. But we carry one sneaky little dependency with us as we pull through the ranks. Some of us don't even know we do it because we become so good at it; we can look down and back up in a split second without skipping a beat.

But what if that split second meant the difference between a championship win and second place? What if we just lost a tenth or more because our horse felt our balance in the saddle change, then changed its momentum? Or worse, we went off course, hit a gate cone or a barrel, or missed the number 5 target because we started looking for our holster before we've even completed the shot? It happens, and it happens a lot. If you wish to test this observation, simply sit down in the arena at the number 5 target next time you are at a shoot and observe. Your findings will amaze you.

So now that we've started thinking about this, we need to identify the whys-its and the what-nots to be able to correct it.



WHY:

Our sight provides a form of reassurance

We use our eyes to see the holster, therefore ensuring that the gun is going to the right place.

When we are on the clock, we subconsciously think we do not have enough time to holster the gun, creating rush. When we feel rushed we typically revert to muscle memory. If we have created muscle memory of looking for our holster, this will be our first instinct.

HOW TO CHANGE THIS: GO BACK TO SQUARE ONE

It's nearly impossible to break this habit in competition. You must work on it at home and make a conscious effort to ride your drills slowly without looking down for your gun changes.

Once you have worked on this slowly, start adding more speed, while keeping this as your goal.

GIVE YOURSELF THE PERMISSION TO TRY

Tell yourself that you will try at least 3+ times to find your holster before you look for it.

Set up a drill pattern where you have to ride through four gates in a row, one at each corner of the arena, doing a gun change in between each gate.

Have someone watch you and remind you to look ahead as many times we do not realize we look down because we are doing it subconsciously.

You might just surprise yourself in that you CAN find it without looking; it just takes practice and a reassignment of muscle memory. 🐾

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